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## Former MPs still holding Diplomatic Passports 'illegally' – Minister

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Shirley Ayorkor Botchway, Minister of Foreign Affairs

Indications from the Foreign Affairs Ministry are that, there are still a number of former Members of Parliament and former government officials illegally in possession of Diplomatic Passports.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shirley Ayorkor Botchway, noted that her Ministry was still receiving Diplomatic Passports from former officials and so far, "a good number of them" have returned their Diplomatic Passports.

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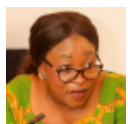
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**4 'visa fraud' MPs to lose Diplomatic Passports if guilty - Minister**



**Four MPs barred from the UK for 'visa fraud'**

current and one former Members of Parliament have been barred from entering the UK for allegedly indulging in visa fraud.

The alleged visa fraud came to the fore after the sighting of a confidential letter the British High Commission in Ghana wrote to the Speaker of Parliament accusing the MPs of facilitating the entry of supposed relatives to the UK, using their Diplomatic Passports.

The letter cited Richard Acheampong, MP for Bia East in the Western Region; Joseph Benhazin Dahah, MP for Asutifi North in the Brong Ahafo region; Johnson Kwaku Adu, MP for Ahafo Ano South West in the Ashanti Region and George Boakye, former MP for Asunafo South in the Brong Ahafo.

The letter, signed by the British High Commissioner to Ghana, Jon Benjamin, questioned if it was legitimate for ex-MPs to continue to possess and use diplomatic passports.



Jon Benjamin

The letter also asked what procedures were in place to ensure that diplomatic passports are removed forthwith from former MPs.

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"Once an MP is no longer in the service of the state, that MP is no longer entitled to the use of the passport because it clearly states in the law, the Passports and Travels certificates Act of 1967, that only those who are proceeding abroad on official government business who should be issued with diplomatic passports so the MPs fall under this provision."

The duration of the passport is however five years, presenting a period of overlap in the case of MPs who serve a single four-year term.

### Diplomatic Passports still being returned

On what her outfit is doing to retrieve these Diplomatic Passports, Madam Ayorkor Botchway noted that, "as a Ministry, we have put an advert in the newspaper asking former Members of Parliament and the members of the immediate past government to return their diplomatic passports and a good number of them have done so and they continue to do so."

"As soon as it gets to a point where we believe we have given them enough time, we will take steps to ensure that whoever has diplomatic passports in their possession, will not be able to do this, and if it means informing the embassies that these are passports that are not valid, we will do so," the Minister added.

### What the law says (Passport and Travel certificates Law, 1993)

(1)The Member responsible may issue a diplomatic passport to;

(a) any member of the Government of Ghana proceeding abroad on official Government business and the wife of such member who accompanies him on his journey;

(b) any diplomatic representative of Ghana accredited to any other country or to any official international organization as head of mission, and any member of the diplomatic staff of such representative;

(c) any consular officer of Ghana;

(d) the wife and every member of the immediate family residing with him of any person referred to at

(b) or (c) to whom a diplomatic passport is issued; and

(e) the head of any delegation of Ghana attending an international conference or convention at which countries are officially represented.

(f) any prominent citizen or high public official of Ghana, proceeding abroad who, in the opinion of Government, requires such passport for the purpose for which he is travelling abroad.

(2) A diplomatic passport shall not be issued to any person other than those referred to in sub-paragraph

–

By: Delali Adogla-Bessa/citifmonline.com/Ghana

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